

**July 1 – Monday of the Second Week after Pentecost**  
**Romans 2:28-3:18**

**Apostolic Teaching, continued – Under Sin: Romans 2:28-3:18, especially vs. 3:9:** “For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin.” We are all sinners who face God’s sentence, as Saint Paul reminds us in this passage. The apostle insists on the reality that “there is none righteous, no, not one” (vs. 10). And yet although unrighteousness is universal, it “demonstrates the righteousness of God” (vs. 5). God’s righteousness is the antithesis of sin.

The crucifixion of Christ expresses the reality of sin, but it also reveals the mercy and righteousness of God like a luminous icon. When we examine the apostle’s description of sin in verses 10-18, we behold the positive way that the Lord provides for our deliverance from *under sin* (vs. 9) and thus demonstrates His righteousness. Since by grace Christ embraced the Cross and now acts on our behalf, we have a positive blueprint for a life which is the opposite of death and our existence *under sin*.

Truly, “none is righteous” (vs. 10), and yet each time we die with Christ (vs. 6:2-5) we are exhibiting the righteousness of God. Christ our God shows that what is impossible with man is possible with God (Lk 18:27). Let us be illumined, despite the sinful condition in which we find ourselves, and take up our struggle for God’s gift of life.

Indeed, we need no longer remain devoid of understanding (Rom 3:11). When we are tempted, we may cry for mercy. We may fall, yet God is still standing, ready to lift us up. Let us seek Him when we are uncertain. Let others turn aside (vs. 12) while we cling to the living Lord, to Truth and Life (Jn 14:6). We have the choice to be profitable or unprofitable servants (Rom 3:12).

Christ is actively helping us, His beloved, to be fruitful. He is the Vine; when we abide in Him, we may bear much fruit (Jn 15:5). Perhaps the good we seek to accomplish becomes fouled by our sin, since we are *under sin*. Yet by the grace of the Holy Spirit, our feeble and imperfect efforts at good may still yield God-pleasing results.

Drawing on his personal experience, Saint Paul notes that he was often called a deceiver when in fact he remained true. The new life Christ brings us is a treasured opportunity to speak the truth, to live truth, to be free of the compulsion of “practice deceit” (vs. 13). If we find deceit within ourselves, we ask God to help us purge it from our souls.

Above all, we must stop blaming our circumstances, other people, the government, and other scapegoats (vs. 14). Rather, let us bless! The Apostle Paul begs us to “labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat” (1 Cor 4:12-13).

Why do we choose to continue in bitterness (Rom 3:14)? God has revealed the opposite of being *under sin* as praise and thanksgiving (see vs. 1:21). To blame others and hate them for what they do comes from our own sin; it stifles our life in Christ. We commit spiritual suicide and murder (vs. 3:15). “You have heard that it said. . . . ‘You shall not murder,’” Jesus says. “But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother . . . shall be in danger of the judgment” (Mt 5:21-22).

We have the ability to stop ruining life and creating misery (Rom 3:16). Instead, let us “heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give” (Mt 10:8). *Under sin* we do not know the peace of God, for we have no fear of the Lord (Rom 3:17-18). Rather, we are called to extend God’s peace to everyone we meet, saving our own souls and sharing His life with others.

*O Lord, may I complete the remaining time of my life in peace and repentance.* – Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom

**July 2 – Tuesday of the Second Week of Pentecost**  
**Romans 4:4-12**

**Apostolic Teaching, continued – Reckoning: Romans 4:4-12, especially vs. 5:** “*But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness. . . .*” A navigator reads his GPS (global positioning system), reckons his current position, and is able to make course corrections. An accountant enters data from the day’s operating ledger to reckon his company’s profit and loss. A weigh master calculates the tonnage of a truck, deducts it from the readings on his scales, and reckons the weight and value of the grain brought in from the farm.

Is this the kind of *reckoning* that the Apostle Paul has in mind in the passage quoted above? Does God actually deal with us using a calculator and computation, weighing every gross and minute aspect of our thinking and behavior to reckon the status of our relationship with Him?

In the workplace, wages are reckoned from starting and ending times recorded on a time card, or from totals entered on a unit production record, or perhaps from a prearranged contract price. Saint Paul understands such objective accounting, for he says, “Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt” (vs. 4).

As a tent maker, Saint Paul is familiar with the process of determining payment (vs. 18:3). As a student under Gamaliel, the finest teacher of the Mosaic Law (Acts 22:3), he learned that righteousness before God is reckoned in terms of the 248 positive and 365 negative commandments given by God in the Torah. In his letter to the Romans, however, he declares the universal teaching of the Church: “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23), for “there is none righteous; no, not one” (vs. 10).

Some pious and confused souls torture themselves trying to establish their righteousness before God by arbitrary calculation. They turn their relationship with God into a matter of quantifiable reckoning and seek to accumulate as many good deeds, or “works,” as possible – as if these works will offset their sins and offenses and create a favorable balance sheet on the Day of Judgment (Mk 10:17-27).

Saint Paul urges us to reject the idea of gaining a superior record of good works, based on the notion that God will then owe us eternal life. Our sins always outweigh our good deeds, leaving us reckoned as unrighteous before God.

The apostle suggests that righteousness is possible if we believe in God and accept the truth that God alone justifies the ungodly and reckons sinners as righteous before Him (Rom 4:5). The experience of King David is offered by Saint Paul as an example of how “God imputes righteousness apart from works” (vs. 6).

As an adulterer and a murderer, David knows that God is justified in declaring him a sinner from the moment of his conception (Ps 50:5). He knows what will happen if God is to reckon the tally of his good deeds against his sins (Ps 50: 3-4). However, David also knows the blessing that comes to “those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered” by God (Rom 4:7).

God’s gift of faith allows us to hope that we will be reckoned as righteous by God, for “faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness” (vs. 9). Saint Paul presents Abraham as a model for how we, too, may be reckoned as righteous by God.

God’s gift of faith is our sole source of righteousness. We should not infer from this that God does not take our sins seriously, but rather that He reckons our sins by Christ on the Cross. He was “made . . . to be sin for us” (2 Cor 5:21), so that we might repent and live in gratitude.

*O Lord, O Lord, who shall stand? For with Thee there is forgiveness.* – Psalm 129:3

**July 3 – Wednesday of the Second Week after Pentecost**  
**Romans 4:13-25**

**Unwavering Hope: Romans 4:13-25, especially vss. 20-21:** “[Abraham] did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform.” The expression “to get your hopes up” implies confidence that one’s personal vision of the future will come to pass. The Apostle Paul links such commonplace hope with God’s uncommon promises, for these give birth to the unwavering hope which is a hallmark of authentic Christianity.

Saint Paul utilizes the Patriarch Abraham’s steadfast hope in God to encourage us to place our hope “in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification” (vss. 24-25).

The Apostle Paul’s abiding confidence and unwavering hope are presented to us in a straightforward manner. Hope springs to life inside us when we bow down before God and acknowledge Him as One who promises, for His integrity is absolute and His power is without limit to perform whatever He promises.

God not only makes promises to His people long ago, but also to us and to all who take Him at His word. If we trust in God’s promises, we take them as our operating assumptions for life. We glorify Him even when outward circumstances seem to contradict what He promised. Such is the nature of unwavering hope.

When God promises Abraham that he will become “the father of many nations” (vs. 18), he “did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief” (vs. 20). Rather, Abraham is “fully convinced that what [God] had promised He was also able to perform” (vs. 21).

Christ our God and Savior made many promises to us during His earthly life. Scripture records numerous examples. When Christ says, “For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved,” He adds this promise: “He who believes in Him is not condemned” (Jn 3:17-18).

“If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you,” He assures us (Mt 6:14). When He warns, “You will be hated by all for My name’s sake,” Christ adds this promise: “But he who endures to the end will be saved” (Mt 10:22).

We also receive promises from the Lord Jesus concerning the resurrection of the dead. “The hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation” (Jn 5:28-29).

“Those who are counted worthy to attain that age, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; nor can they die anymore, for they are equal to the angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection” (Lk 20:35-36).

The Apostle Paul assures us that the promises made to Abraham were not intended solely for that patriarch and his physical descendants, the children of Israel. Rather, God’s promises are for all who have “the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all” (Rom 4:16). God’s promise “shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead” (vs. 24).

Let us have unwavering confidence and hope in God’s promises, even when events seem to run contrary to His word. For God’s word is capable of overturning our sensory impressions and even achieving what statistics assert to be impossible. Let us have unwavering hope in God; He performs His promises (vs. 21)!

*O Lord, make us worthy to abide in the unwavering light of Thine undying promises!*

**July 4 – Thursday of the Second Week after Pentecost**  
**Romans 5:10-16**

**Reconciliation: Romans 5:10-16, especially vs. 15:** “*But the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man’s offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many.*” Not long ago, major political changes in South Africa resulted in a general amnesty for the opponents of the former regime. Persons imprisoned for many years were released, and soon after Nelson Mandela, one of the long-term prisoners, was elected president of the country.

This reversal of political fortune is analogous of Saint Paul’s teaching concerning reconciliation in today’s passage from Romans. The Apostle, however, addresses the most complete reversal of circumstances to be found in all of human history: the restoration of communion between God and mankind “through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation” (vs. 11).

Of course, no one compels us to accept reconciliation with God, and many still choose to reject Him. Yet if we accept what God has done, then “we have become friends, and there is no further need of death,” observes Saint John Chrysostom. “What is there then to prevent us any more from obtaining the things to come? Nothing!” (“Homily 9 on Romans,” NPNF First Series, vol. 11, p. 398).

To grasp Saint Paul’s teaching, we must understand sin as far more than a childish tantrum – it constitutes full-scale rebellion and enmity against God. Indeed, Saint Paul reminds us that “we were enemies” of God (vs. 10).

“But as soon as we listened to God’s adversary and had eaten of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, we had the boldness, the audacity, the arrogance, the gracelessness to judge and blame others rather than ourselves [Eve says]. Confess I must that our feeble attempt to imitate God our Maker and think ourselves ready for true contemplation produced only cowardly recriminations, quarrels, enmity, entirely untempered by love and mercy” (Manley, *The Lament of Eve*, p. 68).

By the Cross, however, we have a new basis for relationship with God and our fellow human beings. The Apostle Paul emphasizes the untarnished, selfless, loving quality of God’s reconciliation, calling it a “free gift” (vs. 15). This “gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ” (vs. 15) justifies our relationship with God, ends our antagonism against our Creator, and reestablishes fellowship.

“For . . . us who lived in so great wickedness to be saved, was a very great mark of our being exceedingly beloved by Him that saved us,” Chrysostom continues. “For there is not anything that counts so much in the way of glory and confidence, as the being treated as friends by God, and finding a Friend in Him that loveth us. . . . He loved us when we hated Him, and also continueth to love us” (p. 399).

Finally, the apostle contrasts our former enmity with God with the genuine friendship we now enjoy through our Lord Jesus Christ. First, “sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned” (vs. 12). Yet while death reigned, Jesus our Lord triumphed over hades, bestowing life upon those in the tombs – “the grace of God and the gift by grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ . . . to many” (vs. 15).

Let us rejoice “in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation” (vs. 11). Because of Christ, everything has changed. Joy has come into the world. Let us not delay, but take our rightful place with the only Friend of mankind.

*Glory to Thee who hast made us to pass from death to life and from earth to heaven!* – The Paschal Canon

**July 5 – Friday of the Second Week after Pentecost**  
**Romans 5:17-6:2**

**Reigning: Romans 5:17-6:2, especially vs. 21:** “So that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Starting at Romans 5:14, Saint Paul contrasts life in Christ with a life lived apart from God. If we embrace God’s grace and His gift of righteousness, however, we “will reign in life through . . . Jesus Christ” (vs. 17).

Here we find the glorious alternative to the ubiquitous reign of sin and death which disrupted our original communion with God. Christ has destroyed sin’s power over us, revealing instead the coming of divine grace that leads to eternal life under the reign of Christ.

The apostle explains how these opposing “reigns” began. “Through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation” (vs. 18). The first Adam initiated the reign of sin and death by his transgression and fall.

Even so, Saint Paul continues, “through one Man’s righteous act, the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life” (vs. 18). The Lord Jesus is the new Adam who inaugurates the reign of grace and life.

Following Adam’s disobedience, death assumed universal power (vs. 12), but Christ now enables us to receive “abundance of grace and . . . the gift of righteousness,” so as “to reign in this life” (vs. 17). While death remains because of our sin, its power may be overcome through the free gift of God, resulting “in justification of life” (vs. 18) by which “many will be made righteous” (vs. 19).

How so? Grace and righteousness are gifts provided by Christ in this present existence, enabling men to “reign in life” (vs. 17), to grow in righteousness, and to attain “eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (vs. 21).

As the Apostle Paul contrasts the reign of death found among men with the reign of life found in Christ, he also addresses the relationship between the Mosaic Law and sin. First, he explains that the Law intensifies the sin already present in human beings. “Law entered that the offense might abound” (vs. 20).

Later in Romans Saint Paul returns to this issue, explaining that when we are confronted by the commandments, our human inclination to rebel against God produces by sin. Thus we experience “all manner of evil desire” (vs. 7:8). By its very nature, sin prompts us to break rules that God has given for our own good (vs. 7:10).

In today’s passage, the apostle emphasizes that “where sin abounded, grace abounded much more” (vs. 5:20). Since the grace of God through Jesus Christ is so abundant, giving us the possibility of righteousness and eternal life, we may be tempted to ask, “Shall we continue to sin that grace may abound?” (vs. 6:1).

The apostle anticipates – and flatly rejects – this delusion, “Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?” (vs. 2). Although this stance may seem obvious to us, the early centuries of the Church were marked by a fierce struggle against Gnosticism. This heresy suggested that our physical acts are unimportant, for this world is passing away and the Law has been abolished by grace. Unfortunately, many so-called Christians still promote this idea today.

The Church Fathers warn us that sin is stubborn. Like Saint Paul, they call on us “who died to sin” (vs. 2) to reject every temptation to continue under sin. The reign of grace opens the door to begin living a pure life for God. Lord, O Lord, help us to do so!

*If Thou see the way of iniquity in me, turn me aside and establish me in Thy truth. –*  
Archimandrite Sophrony Sakharov

**July 6 - Saturday of the Second Week of Pentecost**  
**Romans 3:19-26**

**Righteousness: Romans 3:19-26, especially vs. 21:** *“But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets.”* Three months after Israel’s exodus from Egypt, the ancient people of God “came into the Sinai Desert, and camped in the desert. . . . before the mountain” (Ex 19:2). The Lord called the Prophet Moses to the mountain and delivered this promise to His people: “Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, you shall be a special people to Me above all nations; for all the earth is Mine” (vs. 19:5).

Moses then “came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before them all these words the Lord commanded him” (Ex 24:7). To seal this covenant in blood, he “built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve stones according to the twelve tribes of Israel” (vs. 24:4).

The commands of this covenant, known as the Law (Torah), form a distinctive constitution from the days of Moses to the present. When the people of the Old Covenant keep the Law, God recognizes them as His people, holy and righteous. Apostates from Israel (and other peoples not blessed with the Law) are known as Gentiles, meaning “nations.” Traditional Jews deem such outsiders unrighteous, for they are not under the covenant with God.

The gift of the Law is a special sign of God’s grace and favor for Jews. Membership in this covenant people is considered essential. Among the special ritual practices that identify one as a member of Israel are circumcision, dietary laws, and honoring the Sabbath, which serve to provide a guarantee of righteousness.

In the present passage the Apostle Paul, a man raised under this very law, rejects the possibility of attaining righteousness merely by living according to ancient Israel’s covenant with God. Instead, he proclaims the great justification before God to be “the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ” (Rom 3:22).

Saint Paul asserts that the Law accomplishes righteousness for those who agree to live under it by silencing human opinion; it stops “every mouth” (vs. 19). As God’s law, it is the highest of all commandments, since there can be no higher legal authority than God. The Law indicts everyone – “all the world may become guilty before God” (vs. 19) – by detailing how all men should live.

Yet by comparing human behavior with the Law, sin is made evident in every man: “No flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin” (vs. 20). The truth is that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (vs. 23). Who among us can deny our sinfulness?

Having identified the ultimate nature of God’s law, the apostle then asserts the greater “righteousness of God apart from the law . . . even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ” (vss. 21-22). This righteousness is not limited to those who are physically born and raised “under the law” (vs. 19). Rather, it extends “to all and on all who believe” (vs. 22).

Saint Paul draws a number of parallels between the New Covenant of righteousness in Christ and the Old Covenant under the Law. Both are *of God* (vs. 22). However, the new righteousness provides a vital redemption from slavery (vs. 24) and admits being sealed by a true “propitiation by [Christ’s] blood” (vs. 25).

Best of all, righteousness from Christ provides a way of life that passes over “sins that were previously committed” (vs. 25). It reveals that God is both “just and the justifier,” giving life for all of us who put our trust in the Lord Jesus (vs. 26).

*Blessed art Thou, O God, for in righteousness Thou didst give us the Law as an aid, and when the fullness of time was come, Thou didst speak unto us through Thy Son Himself.*

**July 7 – Second Sunday after Pentecost**  
**Romans 2:10-16**

**Judgment by Christ: Romans 2:10-16, especially vs. 16:** “*God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ. . .*” The Nicene Creed states that Christ “shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead.” This doctrine has its basis in the verse quoted above, along with similar revelations in Scripture. The Bible assures us of the impending judgment of our thoughts, words, and deeds by Christ our God.

Saint Paul further declares the impartiality of God’s judgment, since the Lord’s standards are clearly stated in the Mosaic Law and written in every human heart, as demonstrated by the existence of a conscience in those who have never known the law (vs. 15). That God judges impartially is a familiar message to us, for in our services we often hear the Prophet David’s cry: “And enter not into judgment with Thy servant, for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified” (Ps 142:2).

In this life we also accept the decisions of human judges and rulers. And yet, looking ahead, “we believe, and are convinced without doubt, that everyone. . . will be required to give account for the responsibility which he has been given by God” (Saint Justin Martyr, “First Apology,” *NPNF* First Series, vol. 1, p. 168).

Our ethnicity, religious affiliation, nationality, status, and other classifications are not among the measures God will use, “for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Cor 5:10).

When Christ our God judges what we have *done*, whether “good or bad,” the standards He will apply are to be found in the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:1-17; Dt 5:7-21). Saint Paul makes the point clearly in today’s passage from Romans, declaring that if we “have sinned without law [we] also [will] perish without law” (Rom 2:12) – assuming that we have violated its precepts and lived solely to satisfy our selfish desires and lusts.

What about the case of Jews and Christians, who have been raised knowing the commandments? The underlying standard is universal. As members of the people of God, we “will be judged by the law” that God gave of old (vs. 12). On the Day of Judgment, we may not enter a plea on the basis of ignorance.

The most powerful statement of the Apostle Paul in this passage applies to every human being who ever lived. As members of Christ, we need to read and re-read this declaration. The apostle states that “when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves” (vs. 14).

Let us pray that all who presently disdain the life in Christ might reflect upon and absorb Saint Paul’s message. But a greater point is also directed to us, as members of Christ. Since the term “Gentile” simply refers to any non-Jewish ethnic group, it encompasses us as Orthodox Christians as well.

When Saint Paul speaks of Gentiles, he is referring to all non-Jews throughout history – every last race and clan. Among the Gentiles are the vast majority of Christians. Let us note the point that when we non-Jews “show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also [bears] witness” (vs. 15). Our very “thoughts [accuse] or else [excuse]” us (vs. 15).

Let us never overlook the fact that Christ’s judgment will be directed toward “the secrets of men” (vs. 16). These *secrets* include our invisible and intangible thoughts, feelings, presuppositions, prejudices, and attitudes, as well our visible actions and audible words. When God considers what we have done, He will read our hearts and all they contain.

*O Master, deliver us from all who seek after our souls. For unto Thee, O Lord, Lord, are our eyes, and in Thee have we hoped. Put us not to shame, O our God.* – Daily Vespers

**July 8 – Monday of the Third Week after Pentecost**  
**Romans 7:1-13**

**The Law and Death: Romans 7:1-13, especially vs. 4:** “Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another – to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God.” In a recent court case, the question arose as to whether an absentee ballot mailed while the voter was still alive should count in the final tally, given that the voter died before election day. Similarly, can a man receive a moving violation if he died while speeding to avoid arrest? Perhaps his estate might be sued, but he cannot be tried because “the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives” (vs. 1).

Under the commandments of God, any conscious choice to violate the divine will is tantamount to dying to God. As Saint Paul makes clear, our sins constitute a rejection of God and our relationship with Him. They become spiritual death for us because sin destroys our relationship with Christ, who is our life.

Our disobedience is the death-knell of our heart and soul. Physical death may not follow immediately. Yet when we disobey God’s law, spiritual death disrupts our relationship with Him and severs us from life’s source.

According to Saint Antony the Great, “Most men, being foolish in soul, have renounced that divine and immortal sonship, turning towards a deadly, disastrous, and short-lived kinship with the body. Concerning themselves, like animals . . . they separate themselves from God; and through their desires they drag down their soul from heaven to the abyss” (*Philokalia* vol. 1, p. 335). How chillingly familiar!

In today’s passage from Romans, the Apostle Paul awakens us to the life-giving Way and releases us from the Law “through the body of Christ” (vs. 4). He reminds us that we are “married to [Christ] . . . who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God” (vs. 4). Just as only living trees bear fruit, so only the true and life-giving relationship with God found in the body of Christ can bear fruit (Jn 15:5).

Some people assert that our faith calls for nothing more than the practice of good moral precepts. In other words, true Christians obey God’s law; indifferent Christians and non-Christians do not. But if we minimize the faith, over-simplifying it and defining it as obedience to the Law, then sin will seize the opportunity with us as it did with Saint Paul.

“By the commandment, [sin] produced in me all manner of evil desire,” the apostle says. “I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died” (Rom 7:8-9). God’s good and gracious laws do not bring about death. Rather, the Law simply reveals that sin necessarily *produces* death in us (vs. 13).

God yearns for us to turn to Him and love Him, rather than indulging the selfish satisfactions and desires which separate us from Him. When we turn toward God, according to Saint Diadochos, the love of God “reveals to the heart its presence there with a feeling which words cannot express . . . and . . . the fire of God’s grace spreads even to the heart’s more outward organs of perception, consciously burning up the tares in the field of the soul” (*Philokalia* vol. 1, p. 285).

“The law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good” (vs. 12) – and yet a living relationship with God is better still. When we are alive to God, we serve Him “in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter” of the law (vs. 6). Christ died for our sins that we might live to God in newness of life. Let us repent and be saved from the power of sin through our union with the living Body of Christ.

*O Physician and Healer of my soul, O Merciful Savior, blot out all my sins, and grant unto me Thy grace that I may avoid all evil ways in Thy saving strength, O Almighty One.* – Prayer after Confession

**July 9 – Tuesday of the Third Week after Pentecost**  
**Romans 7:14-8:2**

**Flesh: Romans 7:14-8:2, especially vs. 25:** “I thank God – through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.” Saint Theophan the Recluse understands well the bitterness of the divided allegiance Saint Paul describes. He writes, “If you feel sometimes such a strong upsurging of sin that resistance to it will seem impossible and the very zeal to oppose it will appear exhausted, take care, brother, not to give up the struggle, but rouse yourself and stand firm. It is a subterfuge of the enemy” (*Unseen Warfare*, p. 108).

Saint Paul speaks of “the flesh” as that which leads us to serve the *law of sin* rather than the *law of God* (vs. 25). He frankly shares his personal inner agony with this spiritual struggle: “For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. . . . For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am!” (vss. 19, 22-24).

Saint John Chrysostom, in reviewing this passage, is quick to refute the Gnostic suggestion that evil exists because of our physical flesh. “On this text, those who find fault with the flesh, and contend it was no part of God’s creation, attack us. What are we to say then? Just what we did before, when discussing the Law: that as there [Saint Paul] makes sin answerable for everything, so here it is also. He does not say that the flesh worketh it, but just the contrary, ‘it is not I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me’ (vs. 17)” (“Homily 13 on Romans,” *NPNF* First Series, vol. 11, p. 428.)

Sin works in the soul and heart, but most terribly in the mind (vs. 1:28) or *nous*, which is the center or eye of the heart according to the Church Fathers. Sin corrupts and distorts the governing of our being at the very core so that our inward faculties become deranged. If we allow sin to rage freely, we risk become fully debased.

As this inward struggle unfolds, it leads us to physical acts of the flesh. Sin always begins inside us, within our interior life; only secondarily does it manifest as physical action. According to Saint John Chrysostom, “The flesh is not so great as the soul, and is inferior to it, yet not contrary, or opposed to it, or evil, but it is beneath the soul, as a harp beneath the harper”

To help clarify the meaning of “flesh,” let us apply the concept of orientation. When Saint Paul says, “For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin” (vs. 14), he is talking about how the orientation of our heart and soul turns away from God. The desires of the body and its cravings then become central.

We ignore God when our inner orientation tilts toward satisfying our wants – the flesh – rather than pleasing Him. It is of this orientation that Paul speaks: “For I know that in me [i.e., in my orientation to self-satisfaction] nothing good dwells” (vs. 18).

It is accurate to say that our wants and desires, inflamed by sin, war against our efforts to live as Christians. “Who will deliver me from this body of death?” Saint Paul asks (vs. 24), and then replies: “The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death” (vs. 8:2). “My heart rejoiced,” says Saint Peter, “[and] my flesh also will rest in hope” (Acts 2:26).

Let us sing the Bridegroom Hymn from deep in our heart: “Beware therefore, O my soul, do not be weighed down with sleep, lest you be given up to death and shut out from the Kingdom. But, rouse yourself crying, ‘Holy, Holy, Holy art Thou, O God, through the power of Thy Cross have mercy upon us.’”

*Help us, O Savior, to put away the filth of the passions and strive for a steadfast heart.* – Orthros of Great and Holy Monday

**July 10 - Wednesday of the Third Week after Pentecost**  
**Romans 8:1-13**

**The Indwelling Spirit: Romans 8:1-13, especially vs. 9:** *“But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you.”* In the prayers we recite after holy communion, we implore God to make us worthy of the holy mysteries. Today’s epistle reading describes how “those who are in Christ Jesus” (vs. 1) become worthy: through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit frees us “from the law of sin and death” (vs. 2) as He passes “through all [our] body parts” and into the reins of our hearts, to use the words of Saint Simeon the Translator’s post-communion prayer. Then we “do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (vs. 4). The Spirit keeps us “from every soul-corrupting deed and word” as we hold firmly to Him, keeping our minds set on “the things of the Spirit” (vs. 5).

The Holy Spirit gives life to our mortal bodies to act and to fulfill the Law (vs. 11). He puts “to death the deeds of the body” (vs. 13) as He reveals that we are “in no wise the dwelling-place of sin” (Saint Simeon).

The Apostle Paul reminds us that the Spirit imparts to us that very freedom “from the law of sin and death” (vs. 2) which our Savior won for the human race. He makes clear that in order to actualize our freedom, we must embrace the gifts of the Spirit bestowed upon us.

According to Saint Ambrose of Milan, “The Lord Jesus first led captivity captive, that our affections being set free, He might pour forth the gift of divine grace” (“Of the Holy Spirit,” *NPNF* Second Series, vol. 10, p. 102). When we embrace that gift of divine grace, the Spirit of God liberates us from the compulsion to sin. However, we must surrender the *reins of our hearts*, i.e., our control, to Him.

When God gives us the Holy Spirit, who frees our hearts to fulfill “the righteous requirement of the law” (vs. 4), we are no longer under compulsion to sin. We may actually “walk . . . according to the Spirit” (vs. 4). We may say no to sin and “not walk according to the flesh” (vs. 4), as if we were slaves.

To do what pleases God is a wonderful gift, if we embrace the Spirit and strive with Him rightly. Saint Makarios the Great says of God’s grace: “Its aim is to cleanse the soul, and so enabling it to recover its original nature and to contemplate the glory of the true light with clear, unimpeded eyes” (*Philokalia* vol. 3, p. 318).

How will the indwelling Spirit set us free from sin and enable us to do the will of God? We must choose repeatedly to be “in the Spirit” (vs. 9) for purification, because He alone sets our minds on “the things of the Spirit” (vs. 5). He alone enables us to live according to His light. He can set our minds upon “life and peace” (vs. 6). He can establish Christ in us and quicken our bodies dead through sin.

Truly, “the Spirit is life” (vs. 10). “If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you” (vs. 11).

We note that the Spirit never forces us. Instead, He gives life to our bodies as Saint Simeon the Translator describes: “O my Creator . . . pass through all my body parts, into all my joints . . . burn Thou the thorns of my transgressions . . . hallow Thou my thoughts . . . enlighten as one my five senses. . . . Keep me from every soul-corrupting deed and word . . . that every evil deed and every passion may flee. . . .”

“By the Spirit [we] put to death the deeds of the body [and] live” (vs. 13). Let us fix our hearts on the things of God, cleave to the Holy Spirit as our hope for true life, and choose to crucify the desires of the flesh.

*From my secret sins cleanse me, and from those of others spare Thy servant. – Psalm 18:12-13*

**July 11 – Thursday of the Third Week after Pentecost**  
**Romans 8:22-27**

**The Spirit's Help: Romans 8:22-27, especially vs. 26:** *"The Spirit also helps in our weaknesses."* Our Orthodox elders and teachers urge us to persist in our struggle to pray. "At times prayer seems over-slow in bringing results, and life is so short," observes Archimandrite Sophrony. "Instinctively we cry, 'Make haste unto me'" (*On Prayer*, p. 9). God does not always respond to our prayer immediately. Like fruit on a tree, our souls may be left to bake in the heat of the sun, to the freeze in icy winds, to parch with thirst or be drenched in rainstorms.

Prayer is not the only difficulty we encounter in our life in Christ. There are other tough, unending struggles such as keeping the commandments, overcoming the passions, acquiring virtue, and loving others as ourselves. Even if we make some tiny gain, the fiend of pride invariably sidles up to steal the victory.

We understand why Saint Paul cries, "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (vs. 7:24). Yet the apostle provides us with the vital information that we may find help from the Holy Spirit. His words bring great encouragement to us as we flounder and struggle, groaning "within . . . eagerly waiting for the adoption" (vs. 8:23).

First of all, the Apostle Paul tells us, "we . . . have the firstfruits of the Spirit" (vs. 23). *Firstfruits* are mentioned in the Old Testament in the commandments related to tithing (Ex 13:1-16; Lv 23:9-14). The firstborn of the flock and the first harvest from the vineyard or field were brought to the priests to be offered to the Lord, in recognition that "the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof" (Ps 23:1).

When the apostle says that we have the *firstfruits of the Spirit*, we recall that the Lord Jesus speaks of the activity of the kingdom of God as a *harvest* in the field of men (Mt 9:37-38). We chose to unite ourselves to Christ and become part of God's harvest. Keeping this harvest in mind allows us follow the apostle's full meaning.

When we bowed down before Christ as King and God at our baptism, we received the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit then began intensive work within us, a work which He continues in our hearts, souls, and bodies. As we embrace His efforts, His gracious work will gradually achieve a total transformation of our being.

At present we know within ourselves only the first tiny increments of this future transformation. Every achievement of the Spirit is His *firstfruits*, bits of His work. These achievements substantiate our hope; we are "eagerly waiting for . . . adoption" and the "redemption of our body" wrought by "perseverance" (vss. 23-25).

Meanwhile, the apostle adds, "The Spirit also helps in our weaknesses" (vs. 26), whether moral, emotional, spiritual, mental, or physical. God seeks our total renewal! As Saint Paul teaches, we must take part in this ultimate restoration.

The Spirit of God is present to help, for He is our foremost helper. He calls us to prayer. The trouble, however, is "we do not know what we should pray for as we ought" (vs. 26). We are weakened as a result of sin. We do not grasp the goals of prayer, so we fail to approach it properly.

However, the Spirit "makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered" (vs. 26). God the Father searches our hearts and knows the mind of the Spirit with whom He is One. Despite our limitations, the Spirit "makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God" (vs. 27), unhampered by the spiritual static generated by our fallen state.

*O Christ, show me as the abode of Thy Spirit only, and in nowise the abode of sin.* – Post-communion Prayer of Saint Simeon the Translator

**July 12 - Friday of the Third Week after Pentecost**  
**Romans 9:6-19**

**The True Israel: Romans 9:6-19, especially vs. 8:** “*Those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as the seed.*” In Chapters 9-11 of Romans, Saint Paul addresses a thorny puzzle that perplexed the early Church: Why did many of the people of Israel refuse to accept Jesus as the Messiah, despite the Lord God’s promises to send His anointed one?

Writing in AD 59, Saint Paul is well aware that the majority of “Israel after the flesh” (Rom 9:5; Acts 22) has rejected Jesus as the Christ, or Messiah. He is troubled by the reluctance of the Jews to accept Jesus as Lord (Rom 9:1-5), yet at the same time he is ushering a flood of Gentile converts into the Church. Today’s reading discloses God’s revelation to the apostle concerning the historical rejection of the Messiah by God’s chosen people.

Saint Paul begins his meditation on this bewildering rejection of Jesus with a series of assertions concerning God and His nature. His declarations parallel the ancient promises that God made to Abraham when He established His covenant with the patriarch and his descendants through all generations.

The scope of the promises is set forth in Genesis 17:7, but here the apostle focuses on one particular aspect. God’s covenant, he notes, will be extended through the lineage of the patriarch’s son by Sarah – “in Isaac shall thy seed be called” (Rom 9:7; Gn 21:12) – and not by his other offspring.

From these promises the apostle draws three conclusions. First, the promises were not made to Abraham’s physical children, but to those for whom God intended to receive His promises. These “children of the promise” (Rom 9:8) are not Abraham’s descendants, by and large, but those whom God “counted as the seed” (vs. 8). God, of course, chooses whom He will.

In verses 6 and 7, Saint Paul holds up a second important conclusion. We can never say that God’s word is ineffectual merely because the majority of “Israel after the flesh” (Abraham’s physical seed) did not accept Jesus as the Messiah. Still, the apostle asserts that God by nature remains true to His word, as he has said earlier: “Let God be true, but every man a liar. As it is written” (vs. 3:4; Ps 50:6).

Saint Paul’s third conclusion is that the failure of the majority of Israel to accept Jesus as the Messiah does not suggest that “there is unrighteous with God” (Rom 9:14). Human effort is of no effect in the face of God’s actions (vs. 16). Events occur according to the mercy of God, whether or not they appear merciful to us (vss. 17-24).

Thus, the acceptance of Christ by the Gentiles, rather than by ethnic Israel, fulfills a divine prophecy: “I will call them My people, who were not My people, and her beloved, who was not beloved.” ‘And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, “You are not My people,” there they shall be called sons of the living God”’ (vss. 25-26; Hos 1:10).

After reviewing these truths, the apostle speaks directly to the question of why God permits Israel’s rejection. Only a *remnant* of physical Israel is destined to be saved (Rom 9:27), because Israel pursued “the law of righteousness” (vs. 31) on the basis of a faulty theology, not “by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law” (vs. 32).

However, all who “have attained to righteousness” have done so by “the righteousness of faith” (vs. 30). As the Lord Jesus says, “He who does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (Jn 3:18).

*Save us, O Son of God, who art risen from the dead, save us who sing unto Thee.* – Second antiphon, Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom

**July 13 - Saturday of the Third Week after Pentecost**  
**Romans 3:28-4:3**

**Christian Faith: Romans 3:28-4:3, especially vs. 31:** “Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.” The Orthodox Christian author Frederica Mathewes-Greene was once confronted on a talk show with a nebulous cliché in question form: “Aren’t all religious beliefs equally valid, all are fundamentally the same?” To this modern relativist view of faith, she offered a straightforward response and clarification: “Many faiths, not just ours, hold quite specific doctrines, and stand at firm disagreement with each other.”

In today’s passage, Saint Paul brooks no merger of religious faiths into some form of superficial pluralism. Rather, he proclaims our faith as centered solely on Jesus Christ (vs. 26). It brings those who affirm the Lord Jesus into a shared and right relationship with God (vss. 27-28), something that the Mosaic Law alone never achieved. Lastly, Christianity actually places the Mosaic Law on a solid foundation (vs. 31).

First and foremost, the apostle teaches a content-specific faith vested in the Lord Jesus as the Son of God, who alone is worthy of all devotion, worship, and commitment (vs. 26). Of course, there is more to Orthodox Christianity than a vague, sentimental belief about someone named Jesus. Recognizing the universal presence of sin (vs. 23), our faith declares the Lord Jesus’ death as a redemptive act of God’s grace by which we are freed from sin and death (vs. 24).

To affirm that Christ Jesus’ death was not an isolated event, the Apostle Paul establishes faith in Christ’s Passion as reliance that depends for forgiveness on the propitiatory sacrifice achieved by the shedding of the Lord’s blood (vs. 25). He holds up the redemptive death of the Lord as the prototype of all sacrifice for sin.

Under the Mosaic Law, sins were acknowledged with ritual sacrifices. These, St. Paul reveals, were foreshadowings of God’s forbearance in passing “over the sins that were previously committed” (vs. 25). Saint Paul asserts that faith in the death of Christ is faith in the righteousness of God, who Himself justifies “the one who has faith in Jesus” (vs. 26).

Additionally, Christian faith relies directly on the *law of faith* as the basis of our relationship with God (vs. 27). This law states that “a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law” (vs. 28). Faith affirms that justification is a divine act that sets aright the relationship between mankind and God, being clarified for all time by Christ’s propitiatory sacrifice.

Saint Paul repeatedly connects God’s action in the saving death of our Lord with human faith to emphasize that each Christian must accept the Lord’s death as a saving, personal gift. To accept the Lord’s death abrogates trust in our good deeds, since it is God who accomplishes our justification. God calls upon everyone to respond to Him in faith, to trust Him, love Him, and serve Him. Anyone may do this, whether he is a Jew or Gentile (vs. 29).

Finally, Saint Paul rejects any suggestion that the *law of faith* does away with the law under the Old Covenant. Rather, “we establish the law” (vs. 31). Praise and thanksgiving in response to God’s redemption are expressed in a growing struggle to keep God’s law in word and deed.

When we express heartfelt joy in what God has done in Christ Jesus, we set the Mosaic Law on its foundation of faith. Let us never trust in our works but in what God is doing, for faith converts the Law into a vehicle for loving God and all men.

*Enlarge Thou my heart, O Master, then shall I run in the way of Thy commandments.*  
– Ps 118:32

**July 14 - Third Sunday after Pentecost**  
**Romans 5:1-11**

**Justification: Romans 5:1-11, especially vss. 8-9:** “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.” The essential linking of God’s gracious justification of men with our crying need to be restored in our humanity comes as we trust, love, and serve Christ. *Justification* – the mystery of our redemption – is a foundational work of God established to restore our disfigured humanity to its original beauty. God has abolished the reign of death and opened the gates of paradise to all, making it possible for us to cry joyfully, “O Christ, Thou Giver of life, glory to Thee!”

Saint Paul elaborates on justification in Romans by describing the achievement that God has fashioned for all mankind. Like a gemologist, the apostle holds up God’s prize and turns it many ways to reveal one brilliant facet after another. He discloses many wondrous ramifications of God’s justifying action in Christ.

First, “having been justified by faith, we have peace with God” (vs. 1). By His Cross and Resurrection, Christ acknowledges that sin drives us to resist God. Yet the Lord also pronounces the words, “Peace be with you” (Jn 20:19-21). The Hebrew word for peace (*shalom*) implies healing, restoration, contentedness, well-being, and the end of internal disturbance and opposition. To become justified is to have such peace.

Further, Christians stand in a new relationship with God, a qualitatively different mode of existence. We “have access by faith into this grace in which we stand” (Rom 5:2). At the core of our being, we are no longer in disgrace but in grace, not unforgiven but forgiven, not lost but found, not at enmity with God, but at peace. He has justified us; we have access to this grace so that we may be completely forgiven and healed in Him. “Exult now, and be glad O Zion!”

Let us absorb this new relationship and “rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (vs. 2). By justifying us, God makes it possible for us to draw upon His grace. “Though I should walk in the midst of affliction, Thou shalt quicken me; against the wrath of mine enemies hast Thou stretched forth Thy hands, and Thy right hand hath saved me” (Ps 137:7). We may “glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope” (Rom 5:3-4). Our “hope does not disappoint” (vs. 5)!

If we look into the depths of the heart, what do we see? We need no longer fear our failure, sins, and self-recrimination. We behold God’s justification, for “the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit” (vs. 5).

More wondrous yet, the life-giving Spirit does not stand at a distance from us. We are sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. The Spirit dwells within, working with us to make us pure and undefiled. “O heavenly King, take up Thine abode and save us!”

“Having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him” (vs. 9). “So let sinners perish from before the face of God but let the righteous rejoice” (Paschal verse). O Jesus our Lord, who has justified us, save us from “tribulation, wrath, danger, and necessity”!

To be justified means we “were reconciled to God through the death of His Son” (vs. 10). We receive peace, the love of God, the gift of the Spirit, and salvation. “Fill me with Thy light, O Thou only Friend of man!” (canon of the Blind Man).

Justified, “we shall be saved by His life” (vs. 10). Let us embrace the new life in Christ!

*O Christ, Thou hast verily made us a true promise, that Thou shalt be with us to the end of time; a promise to which we believers hold as we sing, rejoicing.*

**July 15 - Monday of Fourth Week after Pentecost**  
**Romans 9:18-33**

**The Rock: Romans 9:18-33, especially vs. 33:** “*As it is written: ‘Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, and whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.’*” In Romans, Saint Paul questions why Israel does not accept the Messiah whom God has sent them. From the time that Christ first appeared until today, many of God’s people have stumbled on the idea of the Lord Jesus as Messiah, finding Him instead to be a “rock of offense” (vs. 33). No matter how many stumble at Christ, however, let us embrace Him without shame!

The Prophet Moses foresees the stumbling of Israel and warns the people long before Christ appears in the flesh. “Watch yourself, that you do not forget the Lord your God . . . who brought you from the land of Egypt . . . who led you through that great and fearful desert . . . who brought a spring of water for you out of the sharp-edged rock” (Dt 8:11, 14-15).

To this warning he adds: “You abandoned the God who begot you, and forgot the God who nourished you. So the Lord saw it, and was jealous; and He was provoked. . . . Then He said, ‘I will turn My face from them, and I will make known what their end will be; for they are a perverse generation, sons in whom is no faith’” (Dt 32:18-20).

Israel’s problem is a lack of faith – an inability to trust in the extraordinary acts manifested in Jesus. When faced with Christ’s cross, God’s people react as “sons in whom is no faith” (Dt 32:20). Yet “by the cross,” says Veselin Kesich, “all things are set aright. Sin is destroyed, death is overcome, and resurrection is bestowed. What Christ accomplished with death on the cross is made manifest in His Resurrection” (*The Passion of Christ*, p. 81).

This is exactly Saint Paul’s point: “Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but by the works of the law” (Rom 9:31-32). Indeed, they stumbled at the stone of Truth

The Lord Jesus will always offend those of us who believe we can achieve our own salvation by fulfilling certain works. Such a belief is delusional. Secularists assert that by their own efforts they can save themselves, at least within the bounds of this present life. We find examples of such failed and faithless “solutions” scattered in the dust of history, if we but examine the evidence. Every human achievement comes to an end, for new events overturn every work of mankind. But not so in Christ!

The Prophet Isaiah foresees that God will “lay for the foundations of Zion a costly stone, a chosen and precious cornerstone for its foundations” (Is 28:16). The Church, as the new Israel, comes to Christ Jesus “as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious” (1 Pt 2:4).

The Church of the apostles, as the true Zion, affirms His birth of the Virgin, His suffering on the Cross, and His defeat of death. She declares that “we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block. . . . But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:23-24).

Referring to the rock of offense, Saint Paul says, “Whoever believes on *Him*.” Here he is speaking of the Person of Christ, the true Rock, who while offending some is truly “a precious cornerstone,” so that “whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame” (Rom 9:33). There will be no shame before God for the faithful in Christ, no disgrace before the great throne of eternal Judgment.

*Thou art our God, the God who showeth mercy and saveth; and unto Thee do we ascribe glory: to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. –*  
Chrismation Prayer

**July 16 - Tuesday of the Fourth Week after Pentecost**  
**Romans 10:11-11:2**

**The Chosen People: *Romans 10:11-11:2, especially vs. 11:2:*** “*God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says . . . ?*” In the present passage Saint Paul continues to explore a question that has perplexed Christians through the ages. Why did most of ancient Israel refuse to accept Jesus as the Messiah, given the prophets’ many predictions of the coming of God’s anointed one?

The apostle examines three possible explanations for Israel’s non-response. Perhaps they never heard the proclamation of Jesus as the Messiah (vs. 18), or did not understand their own tradition (vs. 19). Or perhaps God cast away His own chosen people (vs. 11:1). The apostle firmly rejects all three possibilities, carefully documenting his reasons.

Before refuting these explanations, Saint Paul lays a theological foundation for describing God’s ways with men. Let us pay careful attention to his reasoning, for God has a *modus operandi*, a basic manner of working with mankind. First, He proclaims; then He waits for a believing response; finally, He assists the people who believe and call on Him (see vs. 14).

In answer to the question of what God will do on the Day of Judgment with those who never heard the Gospel, the apostle confirms that those who “have not heard” (vs. 14) will be held to a different standard than those who were presented with God’s message. In this context, Saint Paul asserts that Israel did hear, for throughout the centuries their prophets brought “glad tidings of good things” (vs. 15).

However, the people of the Old Covenant had problems trusting what their own prophets proclaimed (vs. 16). Nevertheless they, along with all who hear the gospel, are put on notice: God’s high standards apply to them.

Given the rapid spread of mass communication, the Prophet David’s words are truer today than ever – even more so than in the first century when Saint Paul said of the apostles, “Their sound has gone out to all the earth” (vs. 18, from Ps 18:4). Neither the people of ancient Israel, nor any member of the Church today, can claim that they never heard the gospel. Indeed, Israel heard, and so have we (vs. 18).

What, then, is the problem? Did Israel fail to understand its heritage? This question is pertinent for us as Orthodox Christians, for often we encounter non-Orthodox who grasp the essence of the faith better than we do. Many people living outside the visible Church struggle to live God-honoring lives in gratitude for salvation in Christ. These good people believe in the glad tidings, although they lack the riches available to us within the Orthodox tradition. We ought to rejoice at the piety those who put us to shame!

God never ceases to provide for the proclamation of the gospel. The good news is embedded in holy Tradition, in our liturgical texts and icons. Of course, there is more than one way to hear; the Lord spoke “to [ancient Israel] in parables, because seeing they do not see; and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand” (Mt 13:13).

The Lord further identifies the reason: “For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed” (Mt 13:15). The possibility of resisting the truth always exists.

In the first century ancient Israel enjoyed every advantage, for “we have heard . . . we have seen with our eyes . . . we have looked upon, and our hands have handled . . . the Word of life” (1 Jn 1:1). The Lord continues to meet us in the mysteries, through the icons, and in the teachings of the Fathers. Therefore, let us not be “disobedient and contrary” (Rom 10:21).

*O Lord, raise up me, a paralytic, rouse me who sleep, resurrect me deadened by sin!* – Saint Ephraim the Syrian

**July 17 - Wednesday of the Fourth Week after Pentecost**  
**Romans 11:2-12**

**A Remnant: Romans 11:2-12, especially vs. 11:** *“But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles.”* As we have seen, Saint Paul emphatically rejects the idea that God would utterly cast off Israel, His covenant people (vs. 11:1). Instead, he draws upon “remnant” theology to proclaim this doctrine: Since a portion of Israel-after-the-flesh still exists, it is clear that God does not completely reject the people whom He chose (see Ps 67:8-9).

Any theory which insists on divine rejection of Israel misses the obvious fact that the early disciples – including Saint Paul himself – were a *remnant* chosen by God to form the nascent Church. Accordingly, in the present selection from Romans, the apostle reviews the history of other remnants of God’s people as presented in Scripture. God has proven that He is faithful by consistently saving a remnant whenever His people turn apostate.

When most of Israel failed to accept Jesus as the Christ and their true Messiah, God saved a remnant of Israel who did accept Him. This kernel grew into the Church as we know her today. Thus God graciously reveals His steadfast faithfulness to Israel.

Over the span of history, Israel learned that God would always save a remnant of His people, no matter how debased their lives and conditions might be. While such remnants became associated with the effects of God’s judgment, they also bespeak salvation.

During the age of the Prophet Ezekiel, for example, God declares judgment on Jerusalem and Judah because of the people’s evil ways. The prospect of a remnant thus comes as God’s qualification of divine retribution: “But even if I send upon Jerusalem My four evil punishments – sword, famine, wild animals, and death – to destroy from it both man and cattle; yet behold, the remnant in it, those of it who are saved, who bring out sons and daughters from it . . . shall go forth” (Ezk 14:21-22). This remnant of “sons and daughters” means that there are survivors.

The prophets also conveyed to Israel that God would save a glorious portion for the end of history. For instance, Isaiah says, “In that day, the Lord will shine in counsel and glory on the earth, to exalt and glorify those of Israel who remain. . . . The Lord shall wash away the filth of the sons and the daughters of Zion, and shall purge the blood of Jerusalem from their midst by the Spirit of judgment and the Spirit of burning” (Is 4:2-4).

The remnant tradition enables the Apostle Paul to perceive the emergence of a new minority in his day (Rom 11:5). First, he points to himself as proof that God has not “cast away His people” (vs. 1). He refers to Elijah who, in his era, appeared to be a remnant of one (vs. 3), although God corrected that assumption by telling the prophet: “I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal” (vs. 4).

Following a classic line of Orthodox teaching, Saint Paul bases his theology of remnant on the nature of God. Today’s passage is a hymn of praise for God’s act of pure grace in choosing a small remnant for His purposes (vs. 5). The apostle further suggests that trust in their own works lies behind the stubborn refusal of Israel-after-the-flesh to accept the riches of salvation (vss. 6-7, 12).

While most of Israel stumbles, God’s chosen people do not fall entirely away from Him (vs. 11). Yes, God remains faithful! Indeed, He blesses all nations through Israel (Gn 12:3).

This is the marvel that Saint Paul sees and declares. The failure of Israel brings “riches for the world . . . riches for the Gentiles” – for every people and nation on earth (Rom 11:12). In the end, despite Israel’s resistance, God will rouse Israel to “salvation . . . to the Gentiles” (vs. 11) and the people as a whole will return to God. History remains open!

*Thou, O God, hast spoken salvation by the mouths of Thy servants the prophets.* – Divine Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great

**July 18 - Thursday of the Fourth Week after Pentecost**  
**Romans 11:13-24**

**Gentiles: Romans 11:13-24, especially vs. 13:** “*I speak to you Gentiles. . .*” When we examine Saint Paul’s teaching concerning Israel’s rejection of Jesus, and especially his point that this rejection brings “riches for the Gentiles” (vs. 12), the question arises: who are the Gentiles? The answer, in brief, is that they are the peoples of every nation on the earth, other than the Jews.

Our understanding of Hebrew ethnography begins in Chapter 10 of Genesis with an overview of Noah’s descendants. The focus of that chapter is on one family: the descendants of Shem, called the Semites. The Semitic peoples include the Arabs, the Arameans, and the Assyrians. Shem was the ancestor of Abram (Gn 11:10-26) “the friend of God” (2 Chr 20:7; Jam 2:23). Abraham’s grandson Jacob, later called Israel by God, fathered twelve sons. These sons were the progenitors of the twelve tribes who formed the nation of Israel (Gn 46:8-27).

The geographic area described in Genesis 10 extends from the Caucasus Mountains in the north to Ethiopia in the south, from the Aegean Sea in the west to the highlands of Iran in the east. Shem’s brother Japheth fathered the peoples known historically as Medes, Cypriots, Scythians, and Ionians, largely Indo-European peoples. Ham’s descendants – the Hamitic peoples – include the Egyptians, Ethiopians, and Canaanites, all living around the Red Sea.

In Genesis 10, the term nation or nations (*goy* and *goyim* in Hebrew) appears five times. In Greek, and throughout the Septuagint, these words are translated as *ethnos* (singular) and *ethne* (plural). Here we find the root of English words such as “ethnic” and “ethnography.”

When the Bible was translated into Latin, *gens* and *gentis* were used. The word Gentiles, referring to the non-Jewish nations, thus comes from Latin, via French. Among the Jews, a Gentile or *goy* is anyone who does not belong to the people of God’s covenant. The Gentiles are the peoples *not* chosen by God.

Israelite history is marked by that nation’s struggle to maintain separation from all other ethnic groups. These efforts to remain distinct and separate had a purpose: to ensure that the people avoided the temptations of idol worship and the immoral practices prevalent among the other nations (1 Kgs 14:24). These activities, according to God’s providence, always bring painful historical consequences.

Later, Israel broke into two small kingdoms (1 Kgs 12). The ten northern tribes retained the name Israel, but eventually were conquered by the Assyrians. They assimilated with other settlers on their land and became known as the Samaritans. The Babylonians eventually conquered the small southern kingdom of Judah. The Jews, however, were saved from assimilation when the Persians in turn conquered the Babylonians, for the former helped the Jews return to Judah.

From this point onward, the nation’s efforts to maintain Jewish separation intensified. An exclusivist attitude toward the Gentiles became widespread. According to the Roman historian Tacitus, “They [the Jews] regard the rest of mankind with all the hatred of enemies.” Countering such exclusiveness were prophetic promises that the Messiah would come “as a light to the Gentiles” (Is 42:6).

In today’s reading Saint Paul likens Israel to an olive tree with its branches – the majority of the Hebrew people – broken off. At the same time wild olive branches (the Gentiles) are being grafted in (Rom 11:6). The apostle warns the Church, Jew and Gentile alike, to “consider the goodness and the severity of God,” for we too may be “cut off” (vs. 22) – unless we remain grateful to God for His grace and goodness to us (vss. 20-24).

*Let us extol all the patriarchs, Abraham the friend of God, Isaac born after the promise, Jacob with the twelve heads of the tribes, asking forgiveness of Christ, glorified in His saints.*

**July 19 - Friday of the Fourth Week after Pentecost**  
**Romans 11:25-36**

**Mercy: Romans 11:25-36, especially vs. 32:** *“For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.”* The present passage concludes our series of readings on the question of why Israel did not accept Christ as God’s Messiah. Saint Paul’s answer has two parts: first, that “their fall is riches for the world” (vs. 11:12) and second, that when “the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. . . . All Israel will be saved” (vss. 25-26). This teaching is a declaration of the mercy of God, whose judgments are unsearchable and “[whose] ways [are] past finding out!” (vs. 33).

We need only consider the action of God’s mercy in our own life. Regardless of whether one is Jew or Gentile, male or female, rich or poor, young or old, God’s mercy is indeed “for all” (vs. 32).

Mercy is a divine mystery (vs. 25). We know mercy in the Church as the Savior who “[turns] away ungodliness” (vs. 26) and “[takes] away [our] sins” (vs. 27). Mercy is God’s gift; we are free to seek or reject it. Like all His gifts, His offer of mercy is *irrevocable* (vs. 29).

Why does the Apostle Paul call the mercy of God a “mystery” (vs. 25)? It is because mercy flows from the mystery of God Himself. Note that the apostle quotes from the Prophet Isaiah, asking, “For who has known the mind of the Lord?” (vs. 34; Is 40:13). The great apostle exclaims, “How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!” (vs. 33).

Saint Paul also speaks of the mystery of God in other letters declaring that the mystery was “hidden from ages . . . but now has been revealed to His saints” (Col 1:26). Who hid the mystery and who revealed it? God, of course.

Now, in Romans, the apostle firmly establishes that God planned the salvation of all men. He tells us that Lord God “has committed . . . all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all” (Rom 11:32).

Without being told, we know that the “Deliverer” mentioned in verse 26 is our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ. Saint Paul once again quotes Isaiah, saying that the Lord, as Deliverer, “will come out of Zion” (vs. 26; Is 59:20-21). Does this mean that He will come physically to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem?

The Church Fathers understand Zion in this passage as a reference to the Church, to God’s people. In the Ninth Ode of the Paschal Canon, we sing, “Rejoice and exult now, O Zion.” We are exhorting ourselves as the Body of Christ, the Church, for by the mercy of God we are members of the people of God. In the Body of Christ, we *receive* the Body of Christ so that we may *become* the Body of Christ. What great mercy!

What does Christ our God and Savior accomplish through His Church? He comes to us and “turns away ungodliness” (vs. 26). He is present in the Church when the Scriptures are read and preached. He comes to us in the Divine Liturgy. He reveals Himself in the icons.

In the Church, Christ’s mysteries are received. We are encouraged to “complete the remaining time of our life in peace and repentance.” In Christ we find peace with God, for if we confess our sins, “He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 Jn 1:9).

God has acted irrevocably, once and for all, on behalf of all. He took our humanity on Himself forever, for He died once for us and broke the power of death. Now death has no more dominion over Him, nor over any of us who are united to Him. Such is the great mercy which our God is bestowing upon us! “To Him . . . be glory forever. Amen” (vs. 36)!

*Let Thy mercy, O Lord, be upon us, even as we have put our hope in Thee.* – Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom

**July 20 - Saturday of the Fourth Week after Pentecost**  
**Romans 6:11-17**

**Obedience: Romans 6:11-17, especially vs. 16:** “Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?” In his letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul addresses the truths that undergird the mysteries of the faith: baptism, chrismation, and communion. Now, in chapter 6, he explores three aspects of Christ’s death and resurrection. In verses 3-11, he explains how we are made “alive to God in Christ Jesus” (vs. 11). We are now under the dominion of God, that we might obey Him and attain righteousness (vss. 11-17). Thus we may hope to receive “the gift of God . . . eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord,” if we pray and practice asceticism (vs. 23).

Appropriately, the first segment of this chapter (vss. 3-11) is read in Church on Great and Holy Saturday, at the very beginning of our celebration of Pascha. Today and tomorrow, the Church gives us the balance of the chapter to read in order to deepen our grasp of Saint Paul’s challenge.

In today’s reading, Saint Paul warns us to heed Christ above every other demand of this life, and to obey Him as we are urged to do at our baptism and initiation into the mysteries. Since we are baptized, we have only to obey God’s promptings in the heart, and He will deliver us from the power of sin.

When God delivers us, we are no longer *slaves* to sin or victims of our passions, contrary to what pop psychology suggest. We are no longer compelled by a traumatic past, nor by our nature, nor by any force beyond our control, for we have given all to Christ.

The Apostle Paul explains that although we are dead to sin, we are *alive* in the Lord (vs. 11). He points to our participation in Christ as our being “in Christ Jesus” (vs. 11). On the basis of our being united with Christ, an entirely new circumstance functions within us. This changed condition makes it possible for us to defy sin, to say no to its promptings and enticements which run contrary to the will of God.

The foundation of our ability to resist sin lies in our union with Christ – our being “in Christ Jesus” (vs. 11). On our own, we lack sufficient power to resist, but when we are in Christ His power helps us to overcome every thought, impulse, and desire that leads us astray. We are no longer tossed about on nature’s waves like a tiny ship; we stand against temptation and win.

However, we must apply the power that God extends to us in Christ in order to be truly dead to sin. As with all authentic relationships, there is nothing magical about our oneness with God. He bestows this gift on us in baptism, chrismation, and communion. We must then use the gift to resist, reject, and oppose the reign of sin within us (vs. 12).

The apostle does not suggest that this resistance is easy, painless, or without struggle, only that it is possible. God makes the impossible possible that we may win the battle against our passions and lusts.

However, we will only be able to choose rightly if we guard our hearts, minds, and bodies. Prayer helps. Asceticism helps. Above all, we must refuse to present our members to sin. Instead, we present ourselves to God as instruments of righteousness (vs. 13).

The apostle encourages us, saying, “For sin shall not have dominion over you” (vs. 14). Rather, we embrace God’s dominion over us. We know that God reigns in any case, so let us choose the best Master to serve. If we follow God, we shall be free of sin; if we choose to follow sin we follow it to death, where it surely leads (vs. 16).

*Thou didst raise us up, and not cease until Thou hadst brought us up to heaven.* – Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom

**July 21 - Fourth Sunday after Pentecost**  
**Romans 6:18-23**

**Duties and Opportunities: Romans 6:18-23, especially vs. 19:** “So now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.” The Apostle Paul uses the imagery of slavery in this passage, speaking “in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh” (vs. 19). He does not use sweet, pious language, but blunt words suited to our divinely bestowed condition as slaves of Christ.

Whenever we speak of renouncing Satan, of uniting ourselves to Christ, or of being anointed with the gift of the Holy Spirit, we underscore our dependence on acts of God. “Having been set free from sin, [we] became slaves of righteousness” (vs. 18). We have a master, Christ our King and God, who owns us.

With Christ comes an overseer, slave driver, or gang boss to whom we are to “present [our] members . . . for holiness” (vs. 19). Christ has turned us over to righteousness to shape us up and make us fit for “the gift of God . . . eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (vs. 23). If the Church is God’s boot camp, righteousness is our drill instructor.

The apostle tells us to “present your members as slaves of righteous for holiness” (vs. 19). Christ, however, shakes his head, knowing the changes we need to make. The hard work ahead is purification – for righteousness to clean us up, one by one.

“Nothing is more excellent than this teacher,” says Saint Augustine. “Yield not thy members instruments of iniquity unto sin. Lust riseth up, restrain thy members; what can it do now that it hath risen? . . .

“Restrain thy feet, that they go not after unlawful things. Lust hath risen up, restrain thy members; restrain thine hands from all wickedness; restrain the eyes, that they wander not astray; restrain the ears, that they hear not the words of lust with pleasure. . . . What can lust do? How to rise up, it knoweth. How to conquer, it knoweth not. By rising up constantly without effect, it learns not even to rise” (Royster, *Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Romans*, p. 162).

Over time, we hope to extinguish what is not pleasing to Christ in favor of “fruit to holiness” (vs. 22). Our immediate goal is to awaken shame within us, for “what fruit did [we] have then in the things of which [we] are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death” (vs. 21).

Shame is healthy when it allow us to see that we have produced no fruit in this life, only emptiness and death. All change comes with a certain degree of pain, discomfort, and bitterness. The accomplishments that gain us adulation and praise from friends and colleagues make us wince when we catch sight of our dark side, unseen by the majority. Because the Lord knows our hearts, “what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God” (Lk 16:15).

However, once we accept godly shame with equanimity, we can go beyond it to eradicate the habits and assumptions that allowed us moments “of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness” (Rom 6:19). Shame becomes our ally, mentor, and guide, warning us when danger approaches and urging us to turn to life once again. It reminds us that we are slaves of God and owe it to our Master to offer “fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life” (vs. 22).

“The whole process whereby we were made servants of God has been accomplished by God’s gift of grace, manifesting His love for us; our part is to accept the Lord’s grace and to obey Him of our own free will. We are not being forced. As the Apostle John has taught us, when the Word of God came into the world, ‘as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God (Jn 1:12)’” (Royster, p. 164).

*Adorn me, teach and enlighten me. Show me to be a dwelling-place of Thy Spirit.* – Post communion prayer of Saint Simeon the Translator

**July 22 - Monday of the Fifth Week after Pentecost**  
**Romans 12:4-5, 15-21**

**Applying the Truth – The Christian Mindset: Romans 12:4-5, 15-21, especially vs. 16:** *“Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.”* At the end of his letters, the Apostle Paul often provides practical applications for his teachings. He follows this pattern in Romans; starting with chapter 12, he explains how to apply lessons from several previous chapters.

The first teaching Saint Paul explores is the necessity for us to cultivate a Christ-like mindset. Since we are members of the Body of Christ, our thinking and actions must be formed by the Head of the Body – that is, by Christ Himself.

A genuine Christian mindset develops when we embrace our incorporation in the Body of Christ (vss. 4-5). Acceptance of our membership in Christ – acknowledging that we belong to Him – is essential to the formation of a right mind within ourselves. A healthy Christian outlook arises from the experience of our union with Christ and with other members of the Church through the Holy Spirit.

The Lord Jesus emphasizes that all the faithful are part of a single living entity, like the branches of a vine (Jn 15:5). He also uses family imagery to express close connections, using terms such as father, mother, sister, and brother. Based on the experience of a vital fellowship, it is natural for us to “rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep” (Rom 12:15)!

When we affirm our unity in Christ, we grow into the shared mind of the Church as it exists throughout time. In this passage, the apostle urges us to “be of the same mind toward one another” (vs. 16). Speaking to the church at Corinth, he makes the same assertion: “We have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16).

We should strive to think with the mind of the Lord – to will as He wills, and choose as He chooses. Practiced over time, such thinking yields a Christian mindset. How do we recognize when we have acquired the mind of Christ? We do not yearn after *high things* – we refuse to waste our energy on ambition and status, nor do we seek to acquire what is popularly esteemed in the world (Rom 12:16).

We are given the power in Christ to manage our own thoughts so as not to be “haughty, but [to] fear” (vs. 11:20). Thus a right mindset means never being “wise in your own opinion,” but to “associate with the humble” (vs. 12:16). Christ is our prime example: we adopt His thinking, His approach to people and situations, His self-emptying and humility (Phil 2:8).

To etch the Christian mindset indelibly in our hearts, Saint Paul offers us a set of concise instructions. “Repay no one evil for evil,” but “have regard for good things in the sight of all men” (vs. 17). “Live peaceably with all men” (vs. 18) and “do not avenge yourselves” (vs. 19). Rather, let us leave room for divine retribution, for the Lord says, “Vengeance is Mine” (vs. 19).

Drawing on Proverbs 25:21, the apostle adds, “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink” (vs. 20). 8) We are not to “be overcome by evil,” but rather to “overcome evil with good” (vs. 21). Naturally, these commandments parallel the Sermon on the Mount and the Lord’s command to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt 22:39), for the Apostle Paul had the mind of Christ.

*O Lord eternal, by the power of Thy blessing enable me at all times to speak and act to Thy glory with a . . . spirit [of] humility, patience, love, gentleness, peace, courage and wisdom: aware always of Thy presence.* – Archimandrite Sophrony Sakharov

**July 23 - Tuesday of the Fifth Week after Pentecost**  
**Romans 14:9-18**

**Applying the Truth, continued – On Judging Others: Romans 14:9-18, especially vs. 13:** *“Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother’s way.”* At Orthros and Vespers, we hear this line from Psalm 118: “Blessed art Thou, O Lord; teach me with Thy statutes.” May this prayer assist us in considering some of the implications of today’s reading.

We begin our meditation by recalling the Lord Jesus’ words: “Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?” (Mt 7:1-3).

We then consider several dimensions of this injunction as taught by the Apostle Paul. He discusses the true authority for judging, the dread danger of judgment, and the dire implications of condemning anyone. Further, he proposes blessed alternatives to our judgmental attitude with its vile expressions and practices.

God retains the right of judgment for Himself, and more specifically for Christ, who “shall come again to judge the living and the dead.” Note how Saint Paul begins his teaching about judgment with a reflection on the Lord Jesus’ Passion and Resurrection. In asserting Christ’s lordship over humanity throughout all time, he refers to the judgment of the “dead and the living” (Rom 14:9), rather than to the more familiar “the living and the dead.” The apostle thus deliberately parallels the Lord’s dying and living again.

Behind Saint Paul’s assertion of Christ’s lordship over mankind lies the implication that judging is none of our business. This explains the apparently abrupt shift of topics between verses 9 and 10. In verse 10 the Apostle is in fact drawing a direct inference from his thought in verse 9. Note how this connection becomes quite explicit in the second half of verse 10: “For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.”

In the next two verses, the Apostle Paul reinforces his warning to keep our hands off a matter which belongs exclusively to the Lord Jesus’ (vss. 11-12). For Christians, the authority to judge is vested solely in God. How dare we show contempt for anyone! We need only consider what the Lord will say to us at the great Day of Judgment, if we dare to usurp His rights.

Saint Paul reveals several ways in which we fall into the trap of judging, beyond directly expressing our opinion of others. Clearly, contempt is a form of judging, for it involves looking down on others. Let us ask ourselves, “From what height?” Do we look at others from the height of Pharisaism (Lk 18:10-14) or from that of our own sinfulness (Rom 3:23)?

The failure to respect the spiritual convictions of a brother or sister in Christ is the worst sin of all. If a fellow Christian believes that a certain behavior is sinful, and scrupulously avoids it, and if we belittle his conviction by word or by action, then we have judged him (vs. 15). According to Saint John Chrysostom, “It is not of our own sins only that we shall have to give an account, but for those also wherein we cause others to offend” (“Homily 25 on Romans,” *NPNF First Series*, vol. 11, p. 525).

Finally, the Apostle Paul encourages us positively in “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (vs. 17). Let us cultivate these as godly alternatives to judging. If we struggle to manifest these virtues in our heart and actions, then we shall quickly lose our taste for judging and belittling others in their struggles to live the faith.

*Have mercy, O Lord on all the faithful, and grant us mercy, life, peace, health, salvation and visitation, and pardon and remission of sins, that we may evermore praise Thee.* – General Prayer of Intercession

**July 24 - Wednesday of the Fifth Week after Pentecost**  
**Romans 15:7-16**

**Applying the Truth, continued – Glorifying God: Romans 15:7-16, especially vs. 7:** “Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.” The eternal aim of the Lord Jesus is a people who “receive one another . . . as Christ also received us” (vs. 7), who are filled with the Spirit, “singing and making melody in [their] heart to the Lord” (Eph 5:19), who strive day by day to act and live “to the glory of God” (Rom 15:7).

In today’s verses, Saint Paul teaches us four ways we may glorify God. We may receive one another (vs. 7), praise and laud God (vs. 11), keep our hope abundant in Him (vs. 13), and admonish one another (vs. 14). In urging these four actions, the apostle does not artificially divide liturgical action in the congregation from the praise of God. Such praise keeps our hope vibrant and purifies our daily efforts to receive and admonish one another.

What does it mean for us to *receive* one another? The verb in the original Greek means to “take into fellowship, associate with, welcome warmly, treat kindly.” We find the model for this in the Lord. We are to welcome fellow sinners as Christ does with us, for we are all sinners.

Christ took our flesh upon Himself, becoming man irrevocably, permanently, and eternally so as to associate with us. He did not hesitate to enter our fallen state of existence, but humbled Himself in love, calling us “friends” and dying for our sake. In verse 8, the apostle uses the word *diakonon* (servant) to describe the manner in which Christ acts when He *receives* us.

The concerns that the apostle addresses in his letter to the Romans arose from issues generated by the hybrid nature of the earliest Christian communities, with Jews and Gentiles forming one people. These fellowships were neither easy nor comfortable for their members.

Today some of our Orthodox parishes are homogeneous socially and culturally; other communities are quite diverse. And even in congregations where language and culture are shared, there are personality differences. Fallen human nature can make demands on us when it comes to receiving one another.

However, God’s purposes are at stake. He wills for the Church to be marked by unity, fellowship, and genuine caring among all members. In this fallen world, our Church members are not necessarily compatible socially or economically or culturally. We are the Body of Christ, however – a people committed to the praise of God (vs. 11).

Thus, it is urgent that we make care for one another the very context of our praise. If worship is to be worthy in the eyes of God, remember that before we offer our “gift before the altar . . . first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (Mt 5:24). We glorify God, praising Him who has called us into communion with Him, by nurturing His people, our fellow members in Christ.

The Lord our God is glorified in His people when our hope in Him has neither bounds nor limits (Rom 15:12-13). Saint Paul calls the Lord “the God of hope” (vs. 13). Our gracious God and Savior always acts with ineffable compassion for us, never reneging on His promises, never wavering. It is right for us to call Him “our God and our hope,” for He brings joy and peace “by the power of the Holy Spirit” (vs. 13) to all His faithful ones.

To sum up, the effort required to be faithful does not allow us to approach our Christian faith as an enterprise isolated from life. We belong to a family, bound to one another in love. Thus we admonish one another (vs. 14), for correction and calling each other back to the truth show that we care. When others run into difficulty, go astray or founder, we express our concern and remain present for them. Then our God is resoundingly glorified.

*Love one another, that with one accord we may confess Father, Son and Holy Spirit.* – Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom

**July 25 - Thursday of the Fifth Week after Pentecost**  
**Romans 15:17-29**

**Applying the Truth, continued – Christ Jesus: Romans 15:17-29, especially vs. 17:** *“Therefore I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus in the things which pertain to God.”* God accomplishes amazing things through His people. His activity is at once humbling and exhilarating. In today’s passage, the Apostle Paul repeatedly refers to the active presence of Christ Jesus in the labors for God in which he has recently been engaged. As we study the apostle’s experience of living in Christ, we find that he helps us understand how the Lord also works through us.

Today we rarely hear the word “glory” used to describe any labor on behalf of the Lord. In the original Greek, the word used for glory is *kauchesin* (vs. 17), which has a dual implication and may be positive or negative. In positive terms, *kauchesin* refers to finding pleasure in an accomplishment. Negatively, it may refer to sinful boasting for the purpose of enhancing one’s self-esteem.

The Apostle Paul, of course, is referring to his ministry in this passage, and specifically to what he has accomplished. The aim of Saint Paul’s work is “to make the Gentiles obedient” to the gospel of Christ (vs. 18). He describes what happened as he carried out the work: “mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God” (vs. 19).

He recounts how he laid a foundation (vs. 20) for the Church across the Anatolian peninsula, which encompasses present-day Turkey, and in the southern Balkans, called Illyricum in Roman times (vs. 19). Saint Paul indicates that the name of Christ Jesus has never before been spoken to the peoples of these regions. However, he emphasizes that the results “pertain to God” (vs. 17); thus in speaking of achievements, he gives credit wholly to the Lord (vss. 18-19).

The apostle knows that Christ Jesus infuses his words and deeds so as “to make the Gentiles obedient” (vs. 18). He is in awe of what the Lord accomplished and “will not dare to speak” of the outcomes as his own achievements. Instead, he carefully states that they are what the Lord Jesus “accomplished through me” (vs. 18), recognizing Christ as the sole source of the result.

Of course, the apostle has the privilege of announcing the Lord’s incarnation and speaking in the name of Jesus, which had never been heard there before. However, Christ is responsible for opening people’s eyes and enabling them to understand the words that Paul utters (vs. 21). The Lord Himself causes the peoples whom he meets to become obedient to the gospel; no credit belongs to His apostle.

Later in this passage, Saint Paul speaks of his plan to visit the Christians in Rome as something he has long desired to do (vs. 23). However, his immediate work for Christ Jesus delayed him in fulfilling this desire (vs. 22). He foresees that he will probably make the journey after delivering an offering “for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem” (vs. 26).

Let us not overlook his beautiful aside concerning the exchange of spiritual benefits for material goods (vs. 27). The outpouring of the Holy Spirit that began in Jerusalem at Pentecost now allows the Gentiles – the pagan peoples to whom Saint Paul ministers – to be “partakers of [the] spiritual things” of the saints in Jerusalem (vs. 27). Now, in a reversal of benefits, the converts gleaned from his ministry provide aid to the faithful at Jerusalem.

Reiterating that God is the source of all blessings, the apostle assures the Roman Christians that Christ Jesus will shower them with “the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ” (vs. 29) whenever he arrives. The Lord, by His nature, gives blessings.

*Lord, I have fled unto Thee, teach me to do Thy will, for Thou art my God. For with Thee is the fountain of life, in Thy light shall we see light.* – The Doxology

**July 26 - Friday of the Fifth Week after Pentecost**  
**Romans 16:1-16**

**Applying the Truth, continued – True Life: Romans 16:1-16, especially vs. 7:** “Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.” Christ plainly declares, “Whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it” (Mt 16:25). Such a counterintuitive attitude is uniquely Christian, according to Christos Yannaras:

In contrast with every other code of ethics, the Church does not seek to safeguard the individual, either in isolation or collectively; she does not aim at individual security, either transient or eternal. She asks man to reject his individuality, to ‘lose’ his soul. For this loss is the salvation of man, the existential realization of true life, of personal distinctiveness and freedom (*Freedom of Morality*, p. 266-7).

“Losing one’s life” in this context is quite different from losing one’s life in an accident. We attain true life in a definite way. If we take a moment to study the small digressions made by the Apostle Paul as he greets his fellow Christians toward the end of his letter to the Romans, we may discern what it means to *lose* one’s life and to *find* it again.

Eight times in today’s verses, Saint Paul uses phrases such as “in Christ Jesus,” “in Christ,” or “in the Lord.” These phrases refer to our sharing in the Person and mission of the Lord Jesus Christ. The high importance placed by the apostle on being *in Christ* is manifested in other common expressions such as “worthy of the saints” (vs. 2), “who are of note among the apostles” (vs. 7), “my beloved” (vs. 8), and “labored much” (vs. 12). These phrases indicate the synergy of divine power and grace working with our human commitment and endeavors.

Saint Paul presents us with the elements that are required if we are to venture to speak of being *in Christ*. Among these are repentance – the active reordering our aims and actions to conform to Christ’s will – and asceticism, the mastering of our desire for comforts through fasting and a repudiation of consumerism. He asks us to undertake a disciplined rule of prayer and worship and, above all, to labor on behalf of others.

Let reflect on Saint Paul’s series of greetings to see what they reveal about earnest dedication, hard work, and disregard of self. As we come to understand the luminous implications of being *in Christ*, his words may even arouse in us a degree of shame and remorse.

The apostle’s remarks concerning “Phoebe our sister” (vss. 1-2), a deaconess from the church in Cenchrea, reveal the high value he places on humble servitude as a means for attaining fullness in the life in Christ. In the early Church, deaconesses were blessed to attend female catechumens as they prepared for and underwent baptism. Deaconesses also visited prisoners and the sick.

Saint Paul further describes Phoebe as a “helper,” or patroness, of the Church, identifying her as a woman of high social rank who supports “many” through material aid (vs. 2). Those she assisted include the apostle himself (vs. 2). He praises the same active labor in Priscilla and Aquila (vss. 3-5), Mary (vs. 6), Tryphena, Tryphosa and Persis (vs. 12).

Saint Paul also greets those who are ready to assume grave risk, including privation and loss of life, to foster the well-being of other Christians. Priscilla and Aquila “risked their own necks” for his life (vs. 4); Andronicus and Junia were his “fellow prisoners” (vs. 7), presumably in Ephesus. Saint Paul depicts a community willing to reject not only material comfort, but physical life itself, in order to attain true life. Such grace is offered to all of us who are in Christ.

*May I live henceforth not unto myself, but unto Thee, O good Master and Benefactor.* – Post-communion Prayer

**July 27 – Saturday of the Fifth Week after Pentecost**  
**Romans 8:14-21**

**Applying the Truth, continued – Led by the Spirit: Romans 8:14-21, especially vs. 14:** “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.” Saint John Chrysostom offers this warning to the newly baptized: “If you are not willing to be ‘led by the Spirit’ . . . you lose the dignity bestowed upon you and the preeminence of your adoption. This is why [the apostle] does not say, ‘As many as have received the Spirit’” (“Homily 14 on Romans,” *NPNF* First Series, vol. 11, p. 441).

Indeed, it is up to us to choose to let the Holy Spirit lead us. We must decide to override our personal inclinations when the Spirit reveals God’s will. Only when this habit of following the Holy Spirit becomes firmly established is it possible for us to say, “[We] are led by the Spirit of God; [we] are sons of God” (vs. 14).

Perhaps we find it easier to talk about following the Spirit’s lead than to actually do so. We may find conflicting thoughts welling up within us. How do we know if what we think and feel comes from the Holy Spirit rather than from our own will and desires, or the suggestions of others?

The Apostle Paul suggests three tests to determine when the Spirit is leading us. First, we take note of the apostle’s declaration that “you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear” (vs. 15). When we experience coercion or compulsion before a decision or action, we should regard it as a sign of the need for caution. Such promptings are not of the Holy Spirit.

Feelings of duress and pressure are indeed signs of other spirits (1 Jn 4:1). We may experience the pressure of our passions (Ps 37:7); spiritual immaturity and confusion (Heb 5:11-14); or sin and darkening of our heart (Rom 1:21).

To distinguish between our own feelings and thoughts and the guidance of the Spirit requires regular prayer, long practice in discernment, and the counsel of a spiritual advisor and wise pastor. The Scriptures help us to prepare our hearts to hear the Spirit. But we must remember that He cannot lead if we simply rush to the Bible, grasping for a verse, or thumb through the writings of the Fathers in search of a word we want to hear.

Rather, we must develop a habit of reading and meditating on the great treasures of holy tradition so as to steep ourselves in the mind of Christ. If even Saint Paul says that “the love of Christ compels us” (2 Cor 5:14), then how can we be confident that we clearly distinguish between the prompting of the Spirit and the urging of our desires and cravings?

Only when we grow in our relationship with the Holy Spirit will we receive sure, quiet confidence from Him. Only then may we hope to respond correctly to His leading and His restraint. With time, we can learn to know if a caution comes from God, or from other sources.

A second sign is becoming alert to *fear* (vs. 15). What is true about bondage applies also to fearful emotion. Growth in the Spirit produces godly fear and joy in the heart. These gifts enable us to reject fears generated by other spirits, or prompted by the cautions of those who do not know the Lord, but strive to arouse us to faithlessness.

Finally, the Apostle Paul reveals a third way to know if we are children of God: “If indeed we suffer with [Christ]” (vs. 17). Resonance of our spirits with the Holy Spirit leads us to embrace suffering for the Lord’s sake, however it may come. When we are willing to endure discomfort or pain in our struggle to draw closer to God, we also gain in our capacity to be led unfailingly by the Spirit.

*Cleanse my soul. Sanctify my mind. Enlighten my five senses. Establish me in Thy fear.* – Post-communion prayer of Saint Simeon the Translator

**July 28 – Fifth Sunday after Pentecost**  
**Romans 10:1-10**

**Heart's Desire: Romans 10:1-10, especially vs. 1:** *“Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved.”* How can we fail to sympathize with the Apostle Paul's desire, which he candidly shares in today's reading? Many of us, like Saint Paul, have loved ones, friends, neighbors, and acquaintances who exhibit godly virtues and laudable attitudes that are praised and encouraged by the Lord. Yet still they remain “ignorant of God's righteousness . . . seeking to establish their own righteousness, [for they] have not submitted to the righteousness of God” (vs. 3).

Over the last century, the tides of secularism and nihilism have swelled into a great flood, producing every imaginable form of indifference, resistance, and hostility toward the Christian faith. We understand Saint Paul, for we experience his pain and helplessness when those dear to our hearts turn away from belief “unto righteousness” and reject “confession . . . made unto salvation” (vs. 10).

What can we do? Let us take note of the apostle's attitude. He does not turn away from his lost brethren. Rather, they remain his *heart's desire*: he prays “that they may be saved” (vs. 1) and continues to preach the word of faith. He confesses the Lord Jesus with his mouth and believes in his heart “that God has raised Him from the dead” (vs. 9).

We may be tempted to close our hearts to our loved ones in order to avoid the pain of facing their unbelief. Often, those who live outside the faith urge us to quit worrying about them. They beg us to accept their indifference and resistance as a matter of free choice. They consider their lives as valid as the lives of those of us participating in the Church.

However, we cannot accept such suggestions without compartmentalizing our heart. How can we place those dear to us into emotional cold storage, refusing to concern ourselves about their souls' great loss? “The love of Christ compels us” (2 Cor 5:14), for “much water will not be able to quench love” (SS 8:7).

In the case of unbelieving children, we may be tempted to think of their actions as a betrayal of what we taught them and of the ideals we raised them to follow. Still, we must not harden our hearts and replace affection with anger. We must reject the temptation to exclude or forget them; rather, it is imperative that we “love one another, for love is of God” (1 Jn 4:7). Let our heart's desire remain, even as we suffer.

We learn from the Apostle Paul to never cease praying for our loved ones and all who stand apart from the faith. To give up praying constitutes a lack of faith on our part. To refuse to pray is tantamount to abandoning hope that God hears, cares, and seeks to convert the hearts of His lost children.

We cannot calculate what grace our prayers may release, for “the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (Jas 5:16). Prayer must precede our every action. The Apostle Paul models this approach by “[confessing] with [his] mouth the Lord Jesus, and [believing] in [his] heart” (vs. 9).

According to Archimandrite Sophrony, “The more we humble our self in painful repentance, the more rapidly our prayer reaches God” (*On Prayer*, p. 157). Pride, criticism, self-exaltation, and hostility toward our neighbor only drive us away from the Lord. Let us direct our energies toward the inner state of our hearts, confessing the Lord in actions and words worthy of Him, that the power of His Resurrection may be revealed to many.

*O Almighty God, our heavenly Father, whose desire is for each and every one to enter into the knowledge of Thy truth, we pray and beseech Thee to grant salvation unto all Thy children, even unto us in our indifference, failure, and hardness of heart.*

**July 29 – Monday of the Sixth Week after Pentecost**  
**Romans 16:17-24**

**Applying the Truth for Right Outcomes: Romans 16:17-24, especially vss. 19-20:** “I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil. And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly.” Our faith sets forth clear guidelines for us to follow if we wish God to “crush Satan under [our] feet.” The underlying principle of Saint Paul’s appeal is that wisdom and innocence must be cultivated in our hearts – not mindlessly, but with our attention focused on attaining true wisdom and true innocence. We have all heard the saying, “If you are going nowhere, you will certainly get there!” It offers a sharp reminder of the need for effective standards and clear objectives in the spiritual life.

The primary standard that the great Apostle Paul sets forth is Christ-centeredness, which means to *know* Him whom we serve. He begs us to remember the importance of identifying the source of our desires. If we grow wise in the methods and knowledge of secular society while remaining innocent of spiritual truth, we can be easily captured by errors that lead us into immorality.

Saint Paul has definite ideas concerning good and evil when he makes his appeal. If we hope to “crush Satan under [our] feet,” we must start from a sound understanding of the subject, applying ourselves to the apostle’s teachings.

When “a certain ruler asked [Jesus], saying, ‘Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’” Jesus replies, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God” (Lk 18:18-19). When we pursue wisdom, we aim to be *wise* in the good revealed by God. Our knowledge is based on Christ, the Wisdom of God, for He is the foundation of all true wisdom.

Communion with God is the greatest good we seek, for Christ is the source of all good. The priority he places on knowing God as the ground of wisdom leads Saint Paul to remind us of “the doctrine which you learned” (Rom 16:17). The doctrines and teachings to which he refers are the revealed truths of our faith: repentance from dead works, faith in God, baptism, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment (see Heb 6:1-2).

These basic doctrines, however, should lead us into the practice of the ascetic life and the spiritual disciplines. Doctrines are not mere collections of information about God. We cannot acquire knowledge of God unless we are purified by our struggles and aided by the Holy Spirit.

Purity is the foundation of theology and a true relationship with God. By contrast, “guile is a perversion of honesty, a deluded way of thinking . . . deceit that has become habit, conceit turned into nature, a foe to humility, a pretense of repentance, an estrangement from mourning. . . . Let us run from the precipice of hypocrisy!” (*Ladder of Divine Ascent* 24.20, p. 147).

As we gain wisdom concerning what is good, we also learn much about how to be *innocent* of evil. For example, we must be innocent and guileless concerning the cravings and demands of our “own belly” (Rom 16:18)! The Lord Jesus lists other desires of an impure heart: “adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness” (Mk 7:21-22).

Our Master reminds us that all evil comes “from within and [defiles] a man” (Mk 7:23). Acquiring purity must be our first step toward knowing God. At baptism, we drink from the fountain of the age to come. Thus, as Saint Herman of Alaska instructs us, “from this day, this hour, this very minute, we should try to love God above all else and carry out His teachings” (Oleksa, *Alaskan Missionary Spirituality*, p. 52).

*O my Creator, cleanse my soul. Purify and control me. Teach and enlighten me.* – Post-communion Prayer of Saint Simeon the Translator

**July 30 – Tuesday of the Sixth Week after Pentecost**  
**1 Corinthians 1:1-9**

**Growth in Christ – Answering God’s Call: 1 Corinthians 1:1-9, especially vs. 2:** “*To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.*” Today we begin a series of readings through the first of Saint Paul’s epistles to the early Christian community at Corinth. With some exceptions, we will study the content of these two Corinthian letters over the next few weeks.

The Christians at Corinth seem to have been a troubled congregation. According to Saint John Chrysostom, they were tainted by “the madness which belongs to heathen philosophy.” By this, he means that “they had become divided; in this respect also having learned of the philosophers. . . . And . . . having begun to trust themselves to reasonings” (*NPNF First Series*, vol. 7, p. 2).

The Corinthians’ reliance on mere human thought is now stunting their growth in Christ. Saint Paul develops this theme in the opening portion of his first letter. Each of the successive passages we read emphasizes another step essential for our growth in Christ. First, we must answer God’s call, as addressed in today’s reading. We must accept transformation by the Spirit (vss. 2:9-3:8), seek true wisdom (vss. 3:18-23), and leave the judgment of others to God (vss. 4:5-8).

In today’s passage the word *call* appears four times. In three out of the four instances, the apostle uses *call* to refer to God’s initiative toward us (vss. 1, 2, 9). Only once does he use the word to describe our response, as the faithful, to *call* upon Christ (vs. 2).

What does it mean to be called by God? In Holy Scripture, the term describes God’s communication to His people. He states His will and directs us to carry out His plans. As a result, those who know God experience His directives as being “called.”

God calls Saul of Tarsus to serve Him as His apostle (vs. 1). He appoints Saul as an *apóstelos*, that is, one who is officially “sent” (see Acts 26:13-19). God’s call dispatches him to the Gentiles (Acts 26:17), where he uses his own experience as a basis for teaching them to obey God’s will as the Lord expects.

For the Corinthians, God’s call requires them “to be saints” who are “sanctified in Christ Jesus” (1 Cor 1:2). All Christians are likewise called to be holy, distinguished by living pure and moral lives.

At the same time, we are called to respond to God – to “call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord” (vs. 2). In the following verses, the Apostle Paul reveals that calling upon God means responding to Him faithfully. To answer God faithfully, we embrace His ways obediently. In this way we receive “grace . . . and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (vs. 3).

God’s grace and peace enable us to be “enriched in everything by Him” (vs. 5). As the Church, we receive everything we need to enjoy a living relationship with God, including proper *utterance* and *knowledge* (vs. 5). We are thus able to address God in prayer and worship, and to speak of Him to others – to witness to the presence of His grace and peace in our lives.

These steps are familiar to the Corinthians, for they have already received the “testimony” of the apostles concerning Christ (vs. 6). The apostles’ teaching has equipped them with spiritual gifts; they look forward to Christ’s return (vs. 7) with the hope of being found “blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (vs. 8).

God is faithful to the Apostle Paul and to the Corinthians. He is faithful to us, and to all whom He calls to be among His people. Let us be faithful to His call as we cry out to Him!

*For the Holy One of Israel is faithful, and He chose You.* – Isaiah 49:7-8

**July 31 - Wednesday of the Sixth Week after Pentecost**  
**1 Corinthians 2:9-3:8**

**Growth in Christ, continued – Transformed by the Spirit: 1 Corinthians 2:9-3:8, especially vs. 13:** *“These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.”* Saint Paul challenges us, as members of Christ, to look to ourselves. Do we capitulate to our “natural” human tendencies (vs. 14) and find ourselves “behaving like mere men” (vs. 3:3)? The Corinthians amply demonstrate such a natural condition by their behavior, which leads to “envy, strife, and divisions” (vs. 3).

Saint Paul asks us to acknowledge what is *natural* in us, asking, “Are you not carnal?” (vs. 3:4). Can we say we are free of envy and strife? Do we take sides or contribute to divisions in our parish communities? If we are to grow in Christ, such behavior cannot be. The apostle exposes the contradiction of yielding to these natural tendencies within us while at the same time claiming to be recipients of “the deep things of God” (vs. 2:10).

Saint Paul reminds us of the wondrous realities that “God has prepared for those who love Him” (vs. 2:9). He points out that we receive the Holy Spirit when we become Christians. Why does God give us the Spirit, other than so “that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God” through Christ (vs. 12)?

God not only gives us life in Christ, but He also gives us what is essential for living this new life: the power of the life-giving Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit we grow in Christ, having a Teacher within us whose guidance we heed. He may be inaccessible to the “natural man” (vs. 14), yet He gives us the possibility of personal transformation.

We need not continue acting like “the natural man [who] does not receive the things of the Spirit of God” (vs. 14). With the Holy Spirit to instruct us, we have access directly to “the mind of Christ” (vs. 16).

This possibility of transformation is bestowed on us when we receive the mystery of Christ at our baptism and chrismation. We renew that gift through repentance, the sacrament of confession, and reception of the Holy Gifts. In baptism we are joined to Christ, freely given the grace of His forgiveness. In chrismation we are sealed with the Holy Spirit, making us capable of spiritual discernment (vs. 14). The indwelling Spirit works in and through our spirits, illuminating our hearts and instructing us in the mind of Christ.

As the Holy Spirit discloses the things of God to us, we gain the ability to face life spiritually, “comparing spiritual things with spiritual” (vs. 13). Even if we still act carnally and behave “like mere men” (vs. 3:3), all is not lost. Through tears, confession, and repentance, we may re-enter and renew the mystery of Christ, being transformed by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

The apostle’s appeal in this passage requires us to return to “God who gives the increase” (vs. 3:7). With His help, we learn to resist every tendency to use “words which man’s wisdom teaches” (vs. 2:13). Instead, we yearn for and seek the transforming words of Christ, “which the Holy Spirit teaches” (vs. 13). even when everyone around us believes the Lord’s ways are “foolishness” (vs. 14).

The holy Orthodox faith is not milk intended for babes who want to satisfy their every natural inclination (vss. 3:1-2). Rather, we seek to receive the mature and solid food (vs. 2) that transforms us, guiding our words and actions by the mind of the Lord Jesus Christ.

*Absolve me, O Lord, from all faults and bonds which proceed from the weakness of my mortal nature, that I might embrace the things freely given to me by the Holy Spirit.* – Prayer of Absolution